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ABSTRACT

Students in four history classes were administered the Reading Progress Scale, form 5C (1975), to determine if scores would identify students who would have difficulty with coursework. Using multiple regression analysis, the scale accounted for only 8% of grade variance. While the complete sample chi square was significant, individual classes showed the information of little use. Grades ranged from A to F in a relatively bell shaped curve, although 80% of the students scored in the 10 to 12 grade range on the scale. The authors recommend evaluating the Nelson-Denny Reading Test for student identification, noting that it accounted for 45% of the grade variance in studies at Harcum Junior College, Pennsylvania. (RT)

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Effectiveness of the Reading Progress Scale in Predicting Achievement in Community College History Courses

by

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The Reading Progress Scale, form 5C, (1975) is a self grading reading test comprising four sections on one page. Each section corresponds to a reading level in ranges of grades 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12. In each section a brief passage is given the cloze treatment with every fifth work removed; a pair of choices, one correct, one incorrect, is given for each missing word. The words are preceded by small boxes; marks made in the boxes transfer from a backing sheet to the back of the test sheet, providing the self grading feature. The test manual suggests its use as a discriminator of abilities for course placement at the junior college level. It provides no norm data and suggests local norming and validation.

The history department at St. Louis Community College at Meramec asked the Institutional Research Office to evaluate the test in hopes that it would provide quick, accurate, inexpensive information which would enable all members of the Department to identify students who would have difficulty with the coursework. For the evaluation, the test was administered to students in four courses, and the students' scores on the tests were correlated through a multiple linear regression formulation which took into account course level as well as student score.

The results show that the Reading Progress Scale is not a good discriminator of student abilities for these courses. It accounts for only 8 percent of the variance in grades. If you are not familiar with a multiple linear regression terms, that translates into a statement to this effect: Of all the things which can explain why a student gets a particular grade in a course, close to 92% is

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still unexplained after you have the information from this test. That is not necessarily a condemnation of the test, but comparisons suggest that others do better. A similar study based on 313 junior college students at Pensacola Junior College showed that 23% of the variance in grades was accounted for by a composite reading index score. (Einbecker, 1974). Blai (1971) reported correlations between the Nelson-Denny Reading test and GPA at Harcum Junior College Bryn Mawr, Pa. as .67. R^2 then equals .448 or roughly 45% of the variance in GPA accounted for. That is more than five times as much as the Reading Progress Scale, a considerable difference, Further, Blai reported that all freshmen on the Dean's list (3.5-4.0) earned Nelson-Denny scores at or above the 50th percentile (national norms); 89% of the students in the 3.0-3.4 range had Nelson-Denny scores above the 30th percentile; only six percent of the students with GPA's over 2.5 had Nelson-Denny scores below the 30th percentile; and, of students with GPA's below 1.9, 80% were below the 30th percentile.

In individual courses, the Reading Progress Scale does not provide statistically significant differences; however, for the complete sample (N=76) chi square shows differences to be statistically significant (x^2=22.87, significance = .028); however, the information is not very useful. Most of the students (80%) scored in the 10-12 range on the RPG but their grades ranged from "F" through "A" in a relatively bell shaped curve. 17% scored in the 7-9 range, but, of those, four students received "F's" to one who received an "A". Neither of the students who scored below 7th grade failed their courses.

One other piece of useful information is that Leibert (1973) reported the results of a project that did not succeed in identifying instructional placement level through the use of the Adult Informal Reading Test.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Reading Progress Scale does not effectively discriminate between final grade levels for students in representative History courses at St. Louis Community College at Meramec.

2. Nothing in the literature suggests that an informal index will provide better instructional placement information.

3. The Nelson-Denny test accounted for more of the variance in GPA than did the Florida composite score; it should be evaluated in sections of the same History courses for purposes of comparison and possible adoption.

Institutional Research
St. Louis Community College at Meramec

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